

SecondFirst Church

Second Congregational UCC/First Presbyterian Church PC(USA)
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Non Profit
Organization US
Postage PAID
Permit No. 3734
Rockford, Illinois

APRIL/MAY 2021

THE TOWER

SECOND CONGREGATIONAL UCC/FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH PC(USA)

Energizing downtown Rockford and beyond with God's grace



FROM REV. REBECCA WHITE NEWGREN

Hello Church!

I can't wait to see you, when it is safe. Please make sure you have filled out the church survey, so that our Covid committee knows how you prefer to worship and fellowship in this season of the pandemic.

Life is still really weird and my guess is that will not ease up just yet. Church is no different. Church is going to feel weird. We have all changed during this pandemic, physically, mentally, emotionally. And by coming to church we risk being seen. The risk we take in being seen in all ways is what opens us up to being in relationship with one another and with our God. I hope you will take the risk of being seen and join together, whether virtually or in person, so that we can truly be the body of the risen Christ together.

Jesus is on the move in our midst and in our community. May we follow after Jesus to reach out to one another and to our neighbors. Wow, we are blessed to be together and there is nothing better to increase that gratitude than a little time away. I look forward to seeing you soon.

Peace,
Rebecca

P.S. I am vaccinated, so please call for coffee, meetings, etc... inside or outside!



ANNUAL MEETING WILL BE HELD VIA ZOOM
Time: April 25, 2021 11:30 a.m. Central Time



THE DREAM TEAM

This is the dream team right here! Normally, teams of amazing people pull off our weekly worship service.

Due to Covid restrictions, we had to pair down to as few people as possible. With Paul's music videos, the five of us participated, produced and streamed worship to you. We each took on different details, some without even talking about it. Valerie turned on/off the lights, Becky filled the water pitcher and prepared communion, Andy ran the steps between the video camera and sound system constantly, I moved furniture. This is an amazing team! We pulled together to do what we had to do.

Pictured here on Palm Sunday this is hopefully the last time we ever have to do this! We miss you all, desperately want to worship with you and will be grateful when you come back to help! Yet even in this time we did not act alone, Jeff still kept the gate, Maria cleaned, Debbie prepped the bulletin and Mary Spindler's artistic touch enhanced our space...so we were not alone.

Even virtually, we all worshiped together and God drew us into one body. See you virtually or outside soon!

— Rev Rebecca

NEWS FROM OUR DENOMINATIONS

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST 40-DAY ANTI-RACISM PRACTICE HELPS PARTICIPANTS 'UNLEARN' DURING LENT



What did you give up for Lent? That's a question often posed by Christians who see Lent as a season of sacrifice and self-reflection. A time of preparation for the hope and joy that Easter brings. But this year, hundreds of members of the United Church

of Christ might instead be asking each other, "What did you unlearn?" Those people, more than 230 of them primarily across the Wisconsin and Minnesota Conferences, took part in a 40-day anti-racism practice, "Strengthening Emotional Stamina to Counter White Fragility." Offered through the Conferences' joint leadership development program, the Damascus Project, the online course asked participants to take a journey of self-work to unlearn internalized white supremacy. [Read more: www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) NO SUCH THING AS NEUTRAL. YOUNG ADULT VOLUNTEERS PREPARE TO 'DO THE HARD WORK' OF DISMANTLING WHITE SUPREMACY



This is it. The hard conversation. You're prepared to lead your church group in the difficult work of antiracism. You've researched the perfect book. You've got the webinar cued up. You have your difficult but necessary questions prepared. But have you

done your own work? Presbyterian churches, groups and mission colleagues are doing the year of service. We continue tackling white supremacy throughout the year, through lived experiences of the Young Adult Volunteers in their respective locations, through engagement in justice work, and in communal conversation as an intentional community. [Read more: presbyterianmission.org](http://presbyterianmission.org)

YOUTH UPDATE

Rachel Huffman, Children and Family Coordinator

Spring is my absolute favorite time of year. I know I have said it before, but I'll say it again. It is a time of renewal, growth, and new life. The trees are beginning to become green, the flowers are beginning to bloom (a few in my own yard popped up already as a surprise!), and the grip of winter and those seasonal blues fly right out the (open) window. This year spring feels particularly special, as we are finally, slowly, emerging from the confinement of our homes. We have resources now, such as the vaccine, to help get us up and out of the house and seeing people again. While we still have a long way to go to get back to life as close to normal as it ever can be again, I can't help but feel the renewal of the spirits of so many around me. The Easter morning outdoor service moved many to tears, myself included, and it was a taste of the good things to come.

We gathered families the Sunday before Palm Sunday to create a piece of art that we hoped would brighten the lives of those in our downtown community. Sarah Hallberg and Karen Hill did a lot of leg work to get a board and some paint prepared for the kids of our congregation to get together in the parking lot and PAINT! We had each child use their hands to create a vibrant rainbow, the reminder of God's promise of redemption, and after the difficulties of the last year, I think there could be no better message. It was a joy to be gathered together, safely, and doing something as a team. Everything is coming to life again, mirroring the life of Christ. From the darkness to the light, we too are finding ourselves rising anew.



After a long cold snowy winter, some of us dream of Spring while others of us dream of CLEARANCE SALES!!!! Already starting to get ready for next year's boot delivery to Haskell.
- Karen Olsen



Children helped mark the resurrection by bringing out the Easter lilies.



MORNING HAS BROKEN: PAUL'S HYMN STORIES #8

By Paul Laprade, Director of Music

Cat Stevens/Yusuf Islam popularized this song in the 1970's, but its origins predate even Cat! First printed in a 1919 Irish hymnal, it was attributed to Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965), who called it "Thanks for A Day." Farjeon seems inspired largely by Genesis 1-3, which mentions creation as not only an initial condition but also of an ongoing process within Eden. The interjection of 'blackbird' in its words is both non-Biblical and non-Beatlesque, seemingly added for effect. The text speaks of the potential of every day in the remembrance of the first creation.

Farjeon was linked to this work for some time, as she even rewrote the words for a children's book in 1957, where it was now called "A Morning Song (For the First Day of Spring)". This marks the genesis (pun intended) of the line "spring's recreation." Yet, despite her storied involvement with this work, Farjeon is not its composer.

By the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution and related heavy migration to cities threatened folk culture and, in particular, regional song repertoires. Realizing this loss was imminent, composers and musicians throughout Europe began notating, recording, and compiling folk songs well into the 20th century in order to preserve what music and poetry was still recognizable as "regional" or "national".

Morning Has Broken is reportedly a transcription of a song related by a Scottish highlander to a compiler of music of the British Isles. The original text, "Leanbh an Aigh! Leanabh bh'aig Mairi," is translated by the transcriber as (wait for it)... "Child in the Manger, Infant of Mary". Therefore, in its original form, this is a Christmas song. For fun, try singing the original title to the tune you know and love!

KFACT UPDATES

KFACT's spring programming is off to a great start! We have been working on reengaging the girls back into the in-person activities with creating vision boards and setting goals despite this past year of COVID!

Each month we have enrichment activities scheduled with guest speakers and we are excited to have Carol Bailey, Retired Lawyer joining us this month to talk with the girls about the importance of career planning, interviews and positioning yourself!



More Exciting News: KFACT was awarded the R3 Grant which funds programs in Illinois communities that have been harmed by violence, incarceration, and economic disinvestment. KFACT and the girls we serve have certainly been impacted by these unfortunate historical realities.

KFACT's Lady All Stars Mentoring Program was awarded \$187,245 for the next year to continue to provide holistic mentoring for at-risk girls and their families. We are extremely grateful for the funding award because for KFACT it was a true lifesaving opportunity to stabilize the program and staff who provide direct services!

Rachel Robinson from KFACT shared why Empowering Girls is important to her! "My passion for the Rockford community, policy change and education began as a student at Rockford University. Learning about Jane Addams and Rockford College (then Rockford Female Seminary) and her life as a change agent stuck with me beyond my time at the college. I wanted to create change, not only in my community but for young women who looked like me. KFACT gave me a platform and purpose to foster change in the lives of younger women who have not yet discovered the path of lifelong learning. Girl Empowerment is important to me, it allows girls to see the possibilities in life, exposure to opportunities to educate themselves, be of service to others and create positive change in their own lives and the world!"



Rachel Robinson

MODERATOR'S MUSINGS

What a year this has been! I miss all of you so much and was grateful to be able to worship in person on Easter. We have all struggled with the pandemic, with bitter cold, with changes we never imagined, but we are still resilient and faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ.

This congregation has wonderful servants who found ways to keep us connected and continue to work in our mission field, both internally and externally. People called one another, fed our community, kept people cool during the summer heat waves and warm during the winter cold, learned through special events and Sunday School, laughed and shared on Thursday nights and Sunday mornings, opened the Thrift Shop, and continued the much needed work on the building infrastructure. And that, my sisters and brothers, is only a smattering of what all you figured out how to do while following health and safety guidelines.

I'm honored to have served as your moderator and know that our leadership will continue to guide us in new and wonderful ways. Thanks be to God!

Grace and peace,
Ann Stites

GOVERNING COUNCIL & ANNUAL MEETING INFORMATION

The Governing Council met on March 25, 2021. The following reports were presented:

Reverend Rebecca – The Peanut Bells recorded in the Sanctuary and worked on a special painting project. They prayed over the Sanctuary before going outside.

Pastor Becky – Worked on Prayer Stations and other worship projects for Holy Week. The Overnight Café reports are being prepared and the team is looking for grant opportunities to support this ministry in the future.

Treasurer – Giving continues to be under budget. We are okay because of cash reserves, but are \$11,500 behind what we anticipated and need.

Trustees – Have approved building use for the Park District and Mexican Consulate. The window installation in Gordon Chapel is going well. The curtains have been cleaned and the chapel sign is being worked on. Much gratitude to Alice Uphouse for managing these projects!

Music Ministry/Deacons continue to meet as one group. Thanks to Donna Schaad who has offered to assist with the reorganization.

Nominating Committee – The report has been submitted and we still need people to serve on several teams.

DISCUSSION:

COVID/Return to Worship – GC broke into small groups and evaluated how we had done in comparison to the article “Will the Congregation Come Back?” Should Not be Our Biggest Concern (6 Better Questions)” (<https://karlvaters.com/will-the-congregation-come-back/>) There are many ways in which we have continued to live out Christ's call to us and some things we need to learn to do better.

Homeless sleeping under the portico – Issues discussed included being the church, legal liability, safety, and precedent. Karen Olson moved and Terry Mohaupt seconded that this issue be referred to Trustees and Missions to find solutions. Motion carried.

ANNUAL MEETING WILL BE HELD VIA ZOOM

Time: April 25, 2021 11:30 a.m. Central Time

Join Zoom Meeting: <http://bit.ly/2021-annual-meeting-zoom>

Meeting ID: 861 3884 8760

Passcode: 318NChurch

Dial by your location

+1 312 626 6799 US (Chicago)

Meeting ID: 861 3884 8760

Passcode: 8224561131

A NOTE FROM OUR DIRECTOR OF THEOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT, ANDY NEWGREN

Discoveries are great. Mix in a little adventure, a dash of conspiracy, and a teaspoon of “OMG this changes everything!” and you have yourself a hit. A mysterious, supposedly ancient document titled “The Gospel of Jesus's Wife” surfaced in 2012, and the story of this forgery is incredible and worth the read. Israel recently unveiled dozens of newly discovered fragments that are part of the Dead Sea Scrolls (note: The Dead Sea Scrolls are often objects of forgery as the Museum of the Bible found out; these are authentic). Scholars were able to reconstruct some of the text from the prophet Zechariah - “These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to one another, render true and perfect justice in your gates. And do not contrive evil against one another, and do not love perjury, because all those are things that I hate - declares the Lord.”

The latest bombshell revisits an 1883 event of an ancient document. Moses Wilhelm Shapira, an antiquities dealer, claimed to have found the “original” version of Deuteronomy. The documents were determined to be fake, a process led by one of Shapira's rivals, eventually sold at an auction, and finally disappeared. This month Idan Dershowitz boldly claimed, without possession of the original documents, which are still missing or no longer exist, that Shapira possessed an authentic, ancient document that provides unique evidence for understanding the origin and evolution of biblical texts. I'm omitting many fascinating parts of this story, but one notable feature was that the Mosaic Law contained the Ten Commandments but not the Deuteronomic code that focused on religious, criminal, and civil law. The Ten Commandments, slightly different from what we have today, open with commands to honor God and close with commands to not hate one's brother or sister.

Technically the biblical canon remains open, and the prospect of new discoveries is real. Who knows what new technologies will propel the field forward or what trove of ancient documents awaits us as we strive to better understand Jesus's life and ministry. In the meantime, perhaps we could shift our desire from ancient discoveries concerning manuscripts to current ones involving our ethics. The imperatives found in Zechariah might just be the place to start - speak the truth, render justice, do not contrive evil. Maybe the most important discoveries are steeped in our existing values.

JEREMIAH DEVELOPMENT

By Sue Kanthak, Executive Director

We're home! After many long months, Jeremiah Development has begun moving into what will hopefully be our permanent digs! Right on the corner of Mulberry and N Church St., our new place gives us lots of visibility and is accessible for those with mobility challenges.

You might remember our new place as Parthenio's Restaurant! Perhaps you enjoyed a great lunch there. Now the space will be used to improve the Jeremiah Development area, plan for and host neighborhood meetings and events, provide internet and computer access for those who need it, provide space for other nonprofit agencies to meet with their clients in the downtown area, and so much more.

As we put the space together there are a few items we still need. A small dorm size refrigerator, a smaller drop leaf table, and small microwave are a start. If you're doing spring cleaning and find you have these items and no longer need them, please think of us! There will be celebration when we are up and running!

As we begin a new chapter, I'd like to thank SecondFirst Church for housing us for the past 10 years, Court Street United Methodist Church for allowing us to store our stuff in their building during the pandemic, and Emmanuel Episcopal Church for the volunteer power to keep our programs running.

SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR GARDEN CLEAN-UP EVENT ON MAY 1 FROM 9 A.M. - 11 A.M.

Jeremiah
DEVELOPMENT
BRINGING ♥ TO THE HEART OF THE CITY

Save the Date

Garden Clean-Up

May 1st

9 am - 11 am

At the corner of Court St and Park Ave!

No Experience Needed!



Bring your gloves and garden tools if you have them and join us as we ready the garden for the growing season!

Jeremiah's garden produces nearly 4,00 lbs of fresh produce for those in need in the Coronado Haskell Neighborhood.



MISSION OPPORTUNITY: PEANUT BUTTER ENDOWMENT

Throughout the month of May, the Mission Team is supporting our local food pantry with cash donations to the Peanut Butter Endowment. This fund is in place to enable the pantry to continue to purchase food for their clients when not enough has been donated. Up to 4% of the interest earned is used only for food purchases. Donations made through our church should be noted that they are for Food Pantry. Thank you for your gifts, which help to keep our neighbors supplied with healthy and nutritious food.



Rev. Rebecca received her vaccination during a pop-up vaccination clinic held right at SecondFirst Church on Wednesday, March 10. The vaccination clinic was coordinated through the Winnebago County Health Department (WCHD) for homeless provider staff.



Paul Logli



Kay Larrick

Paul Logli (United Way), Kay Larrick (Carpenter's Place), Carly Rice (Miss Carly's) in a video thanking SecondFirst Church for saving lives by opening the overnight cafe this winter.



Peanut Bells perform Little Grey Donkey on Palm Sunday. Visit our YouTube page to watch the performance. <http://bit.ly/secondfirst-youtube>



Carly Rice



Scenes from our worship during Holy Week.



Save the Date for our Pop Up Event! Thursday, May 13. Watch for more information to come.

PRAIRIE ASSOCIATION SPRING MEETING

On Saturday April 24 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Prairie Association Zoomers will gather for the Spring Meeting. Our moderator, Rev. Charlene Hinckley, and the planning team are working on an excellent meeting with faith-filled worship and round-table discussions in a "world cafe" format. Further details on registration, voting procedures, ballot, agenda, and reports will be forthcoming after Easter. In the meantime, Save the Date!



SERIOUS SOUP

Our free lunch for people in our neighborhood who struggle is still going strong after a few months delay because of the virus. Each week we put out tables and chairs and greet the guests as they come for a bag lunch of food that is warm and filling. We have a dedicated small staff working each week that keeps the lunches flowing. Guests are always very grateful for what they receive. Serious Soup runs on a VERY frugal budget, using what is already in our freezers and from what has been donated. Paper products and some perishables are occasionally purchased. We have received some grant money that has also helped with the budget. Feel free to come down some Monday and experience our long-standing mission. Lunch runs from 11:15 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.

SPECIAL OFFERING

PENTECOST/STRENGTHEN THE CHURCH OFFERING Sunday, May 23

SecondFirst Church, as part of both the UCC and Presbyterian denominations, participates in 4 special offerings during the calendar year. On May 23, we will receive the Pentecost/ Strengthen the Church offering. The money we collect supports youth, among other areas, and helps them form a foundation of faith. 40% of the offering supports programs in local communities. Please be generous with your gift. Please note "Pentecost" offering in the memo section of your check. Thank you!

SAVE THE DATES

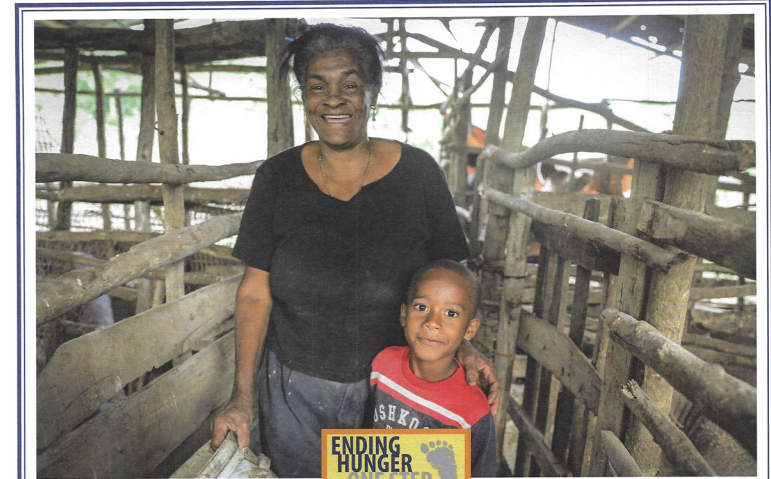
APRIL 21-24
The Mexican Consulate will be here assisting guests here from April 21-24. This will be the fourth time we have hosted this event. More news to follow.

APRIL 24
On Saturday April 24 from 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Prairie Association Zoomers will gather for the Spring Meeting.

APRIL 25
Our Annual Program Meeting of Second Congregational UCC/ First Presbyterian Church will be held virtually on Sunday, April 25, 11:30 a.m. via Zoom. Details on page 6.

MAY 11
We will be co-hosting a Northern Illinois Food Truck on Tuesday, May 11. We are partnering with Mount Zion Baptist Church, 404 N. Avon Street, Rockford, IL. Volunteers should arrive at Mount Zion at 10:00 a.m. to help set up. The event runs from 11:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. Please call the church if you would like to volunteer to pass out boxes of food. No contact necessary, we place boxes in trucks or cars.

MAY 13
Mark your calendars! Pop Up Event Thursday, May 13. Watch for more info to come.



An initiative of Church World Service - crophungerwalk.org

Church World Service
Certificate of Appreciation
to

Second Congregational/First Presbyterian

A national Cream of the CROP top fundraising team with the 2020 Rockford Area CROP Hunger Walk raising \$7,039.56 to end hunger and poverty around the world.



Presented by
Mary Catherine Hinda
Director of Fundraising Strategy
February 12, 2021